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ABSTRACT

This paper considers arguments for and against the value of theory in administrator education programs. In his discussion, the author makes a distinction between two types of theory--"pure" and "process." "Pure" theory provides the administrator with information regarding major organizational components, and "process" theory provides background in the manner by which the major components are integrated. Based on these definitions, the author argues that theory is at the heart of the administrator education curriculum, and that the study of theory is actually very practical. The author presents a model for illustrating student progress through theory courses and a second model for integrating the skills developed from "process" theory in the "pure" theory frame of reference. It is through this process, the author suggests, that understandings obtained through the study of theory become useful in dealing with daily administrative functions. (Author/JG)

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THE PRACTICE OF THEORY

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The Practice of Theory

The value of theory in administrator education programs has been discussed for years. Some practitioners minimize the importance of theory while most university professors maximize the value. If an assumption can be made that both positions are legitimate, then a careful analysis of the divergent views might provide insight necessary to correct some fallacies in current curriculum design. If such fallacies do indeed exist and both sides can be accommodated by an improved design, then it would seem that a major step forward in the education of administrators would have been accomplished.

The divergence of views can best be understood by evaluating frames of reference of the two groups. Practitioners require pragmatic solutions to immediate problems, and because of this, advance the argument, "Don't give me any of that theoretical stuff; give me something I can use!" Practitioners often overlook the fact that problem solving techniques have a theoretical base; many practicing administrators fail to recognize that problems confronted today may have roots in the unsound theoretical constructs utilized in the past.

At the same time, university courses, which do not transfer theory into practice, do little to equip the student with additional necessary skills. Transference of didactic understanding into skill usage cannot be taken for granted because the divergences involve different levels of knowledge

and must be dealt with separately and then integratively. Both are very important components in curriculum design and along with the views of the practitioner and the theorist provide the bases for developing a conceptual model accommodating the two approaches.

Definition of Terms

Basic to understanding the nature of administration and curriculum design in administration is that two types of theory exist. The first, pure theory, describes the organizational components as they are; the second, process theory, describes the administrative functions which cause the organization to become operable. An analysis of theory, "pure" theory, and "process" theory follows.

Theory - Corwin, et. al (1975) provide an in-depth treatment of the term "theory" and the reader is advised to consult their discussion for a precise analysis. However, some general comments will be helpful here. If events are understood in terms of causes or predictive variables, then identification and study of the interrelatedness of key antecedent variables should provide valuable information for establishing predicted outcomes. One of the essentials of administration is to establish the predictability of the outcome of particular events. When hypotheses formulated by the study of predictive relationships are applied to situations in a manner either to control or to achieve predicted results and the outcome of such applications are consistent through repeated testing, then a theory has been formulated.

It is in this context that the term "theory" is to be understood in this discussion.

Pure Administrative Theory - Administrative theory in its "pure" form involves an explanatory or interpretive description of the two key independent organizational elements: the people in the organization and the task or purpose of the organization. In addition, "pure" theory provides a description of the manner in which the two elements are integrated. Descriptions of the two elements and outcomes based upon subsequent interaction provide general theoretical models in abstract terms. These elements provide the "field" of responsibility confronting the administrator. The responsibility of the administrator is to activate the two components of "pure" theory in such manner as to optimize efficiency and effectiveness in obtaining a collective but specific goal.

Process Administrative Theory - Once an organization has been formed and begins to function, all sorts of administrative processes are required to keep it functioning. These processes are input catalysts used by administrators to attain a predicted result. "Process" theory describes the dynamics of the interaction of the "people" and "task" dimensions as the input catalysts are used as facilitators between the two elements. Each administrative process has its own theoretical body of knowledge, and each is critical to the administrator because the dynamics of process implementation largely determine the measures of organizational achievement.

Curriculum Components

In developing an education program for administrators, it is important to separate "pure" and "process" theory. It would seem logical that "pure" theory be at the introductory level in the administration curriculum because it is from this theoretical frame of reference that all other theory makes sense.

Pure Theory Curriculum Components - Various descriptive models exist which should be considered under the category of "pure" theory. Certain models from psychology, for example, play an important role in describing the "people" dimension of an organization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a concept with which every administrator should be familiar because of its usefulness in describing not only his own motives but those with whom the administrator is working. The hierarchy of needs is also helpful in describing the ultimate need or goal of people -- to reach self-actualization -- which, itself, may only be a theoretical possibility. Herzberg (1966) emphasized "need-theory" in his discussion of the motivator-hygiene elements. While the latter may not have the universal appeal of Maslow's theory, an administrator may find the concepts helpful in analyzing situations involving subordinate's needs. Like Maslow, the Herzberg theory is descriptive of the "people" dimension.

Other psychological theories descriptive of the "people" dimension and related to "pure" theory include theories of

personality, self-concept, perception, and psychological-maturity. These theories are more or less universal and not necessarily limited to any one type of organization. Understanding of psychological theories is basic to administrators because process theory can only be successfully implemented when a thorough knowledge of implications is known.

The "task" dimension of the organization represents another complex element. The "task" of an organization is the purpose for its existence. The systematic method of organizing, controlling, and evaluating goal accomplishment provides the framework of study, and this method is termed "systems analysis." That is, to understand the "task" dimension, a systematic analysis of the functions of the superstructure must be undertaken.

Finally, the theoretical models of leadership, e.g. Halpin, Getzels, Blake and Mouton, McGregor, Likert, and Fiedler, provide the student with an understanding of leader style and the components of leadership. The descriptive nature of these theories is valuable to the administrator for providing self-direction and when examined as descriptive models, remain as a part of "pure" theory.

With the exception of the leadership groups, the above models do not graphically include leadership processes, and the practitioner is justified in perceiving that the models have little direct value. Typical criticisms of "pure" theoretical models include those which state that they are too idealistic, too theoretical, not practical, and not

adaptable to real situations. Careful deciphering of these criticisms decodes into the following interpretations: the models represent ideal states; the models are descriptive and not predictive; the understanding of models does not readily transfer to "real life" situations; and the elements in the models are very global. The seriousness of the critics and the depth of the disappointment in the practical observations undoubtedly reflect the high hopes of the critics for assistance in coping with innumerable complex daily administrative functions. The observations by the critics are justified to a point. "Pure" theoretical models do represent ideal states and are descriptive models involving global elements or groups of elements that do not necessarily transfer to real-life situations. However, these characteristics do not justify further argument over their value or suggestions of dropping "pure" theory from the administrative curriculum. The values of "pure" theory are very real and provide the beginning student in administration with broader conceptual understanding of administration prior to being introduced to increasingly complex multidimensions. The "pure" theory models also provide the superstructure for recognizing that the processes of administration can readily apply differentially in unlike situations. The curricular change that is probably justified is to initially move more toward detailed descriptive models involving greater depth in understanding of the major elements -- "people" and "tasks."

Process theory Curriculum Components - The processes such as communications, delegation, supervision, evaluation, planning,

and goal setting are applied in a framework of "pure" theory. That is, the processes are applied to an organization consisting of people striving to fulfill individual and collective objectives. The manner of application is dependent upon the administrator's view of the people and what he views as the group's task. With a comprehensive background in psychological theory, systems analysis, and leadership theory, the administrator will perhaps view the value of subordinates, the task to be accomplished, and his leader style in a much different manner and will implement the processes in a different fashion. For example, group planning can be accomplished by the administrator for the group, or it can be done by sharing the activity with the group. "Pure" theory prior to "process" theory provides the student with the value of participative planning. Without this background, planning is likely to remain a pragmatic activity done solely by the administrator.

The daily activities of an administrator are primarily concerned with the processes which initiate, integrate, and facilitate the operation of the elements in the "pure" theory models. Each process is important and complex and must be thoroughly understood against the background of "pure" theory for optimal results.

Purpose of Training Programs

Administrator training programs operate from a premise that administrators are leaders and that leaders can be developed by education. The distinction between "operational" and "preparational" education aptly described by Broudy (1973) should be made. "Operational" education refers to a type of training

necessary for the subject to perform repetitive tasks in like situations. "Preparational" education would best be described as performing similar tasks in unlike situations or dissimilar tasks in like situations.

Unless the administrative program is approached from a "preparational" position, including "process" theory training, it would seem that the administrative education program would be doomed to failure. "Preparational" education of administrators is designed to provide the basic knowledge, understanding, and skills necessary for application in situations where "operational" training does not suffice. In the implementation of "operational" training, one would necessarily have to assume that an "ideal" strategy is available and universally applicable regardless of the number and complexity of the variables.

The purpose of administrator education programs is not to provide an "ideal" for students to emulate but to provide flexibility through understanding of various predictable techniques in theoretical constructs. In this way, the student learns "why" specific techniques or skills are employed rather than only "how to" apply the technique. The administrator must be able to diagnose, and implement a program to accomplish the goal. The practicing administrator must rely on applicable theory and skills, not force or policy, to accomplish this assignment. The person who can function adequately in the weakest power position has to rely on human relation skills to accomplish a task through others. According to such theorists as Likert, Blake and Mouton, and McGregor, these skills are of the variety necessary to optimize productivity.

Course Content

Contemporary writing and research provides direction for the content of courses in theory. Even before Barnard's identification of efficiency and effectiveness, theorists had been analyzing organizations in attempts to determine elements and processes necessary for better organizations. All of the writers previously cited have contributed some direction in program design, but Argyris and Schon (1974) provide the most direction in application. If the adage is true that it is better to teach solutions to problems not fully understood than to live with problems we are unable to resolve, then courses should provide skill development in the most promising theory of today.

Investigation of the work by Likert, Blake and Mouton, and McGregor will reveal that their work is founded on substantial philosophical underpinnings of countless other writers, but students require a basic understanding of these theories if the entire framework of theory is to make sense. The beginning administrator learns a good deal through experience, but administrator training programs are to provide a short-cut for this experience so the novice does not have to "re-invent the wheel" or duplicate errors others have made. A course using "pure" and "process" theoretical constructs with practical applications should be a foundation in the administrator training program if theoretically optimal situations are to become realities.

Model for Administrator Course Development - Figure 1 provides a

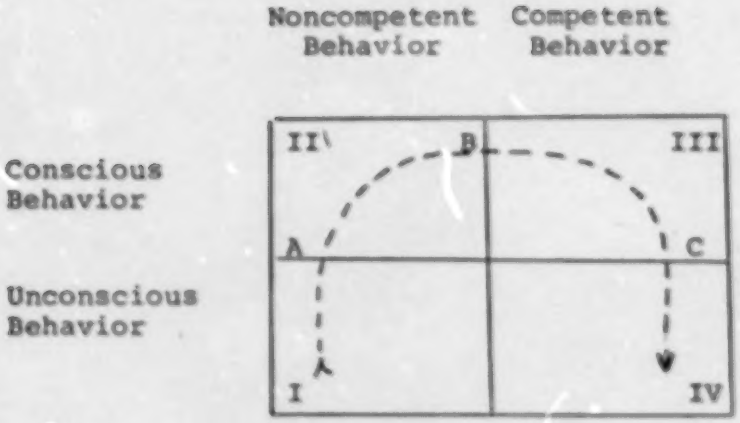

Figure 1 Model for Developing Administrative Theory

model for developing a course in administrative theory be it pure or process theory. The student normally would come to the course at a Level I or at an "unconscious-noncompetent" position. "Noncompetent" is used to include both "not competent" and "incompetent." The novice is not conscious of the theoretical base from which he operates nor does he know the type of behavior required to derive the most desired results. Level I is a position of unawareness to the body of theoretical knowledge which, if known, would be most helpful.

The course in theory should introduce the student initially to the field by bringing an awareness of the existence and exposure to the premises on which contemporary administrative theory is built. The awareness is represented on the model by line A. By becoming aware, the student then moves to Level II, "conscious-noncompetent" or a position of questioning personal capabilities and style. Level II is critical to the student because of incongruity between recog-

nition of the need for proper implementation and the skills necessary to implement the process. A significant difference exists between knowing the theoretical bases and being able to make an application. In fact, some contention could be made that Level II is the position where many, if not most, administrators are in skill development. The incongruity may also be the critical reason for the disparity between what Argyris and Schon (1974) call "theories of action" and "theories of use." In personal analysis the individual often does not have the capability of perceiving and distinguishing the difference between espoused theory (theory of action) and the theory utilized (theory of use).

Line B is the point at which the student is confronted with the reality that not only is the body of knowledge helpful but that applicable techniques for implementation are essential.

Level III is the developmental phase where competency skills are formulated and practiced to enable the student to become "consciously-competent." A valuable technique of using self-analysis practices and group experiences is explained by Argyris and Schon; another technique is the use of the video-tape in role playing situations. The purpose of such analyses is to permit the students an opportunity to evaluate themselves and one another in an attempt to reinforce appropriate behavior.

The student has not completed the learning cycle until Level IV on the conceptual model is achieved. Point C represents the area of skill implementation. Experience as an

administrator provides practice in the "preparational" aspects enabling the student to sharpen skills necessary for the "unconscious-competent" position. Level IV is the position that an administrator achieves when habitual correct behavior based on strong theoretical background produces predictive responses. It is the point of maximum efficiency in theoretical application. The administrator no longer has to stop and diagnose the situation in terms of theorists but instinctively reacts from a knowledgeable and well practiced frame of reference. If a specific situation calls for detailed analysis, the administrator would also possess appropriate background to work through the problem.

Integrated Preparational Model for Administrators

Figure 2 illustrates the model integrating "pure" administrative theory, "process" administrative theory, theory statements, and administrative skills. It is a preparational model different from contemporary or traditional models in that classes in such fields as Public Relations, Buildings, and Budgeting are replaced by process theory courses with skill development. Each process theory course would culminate in relevant theory statements, and skill competencies. The comprehensive examination for students who have completed the process courses should be the synthesized application of theoretical bases through skill in solving representative realistic problems in such areas as public relations, buildings and budgeting. The results of such comprehensive examinations should indicate the student's overall level of competence.

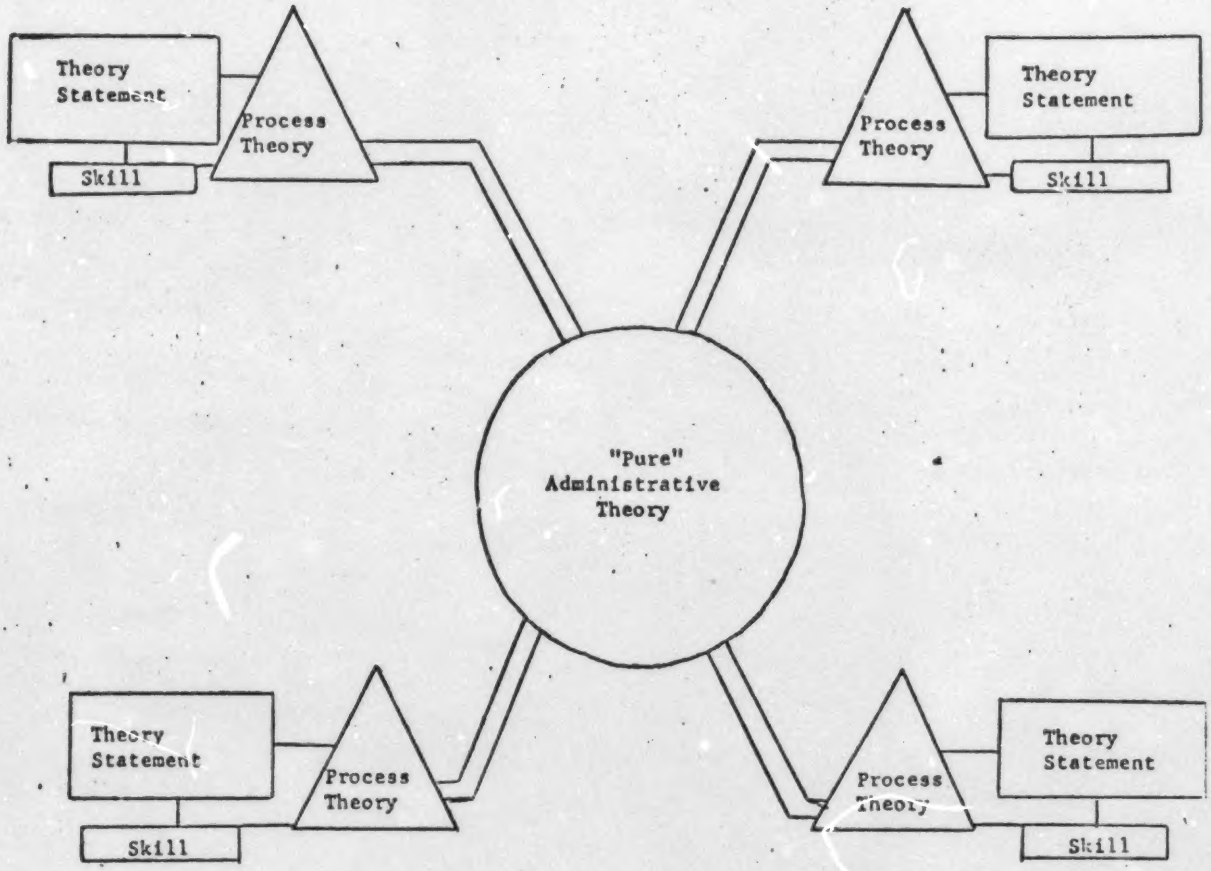

Figure 2 Model Integrating Pure and Process Theory

Skill Development

An administrator cannot be burdened with relating every movement to a particular theoretical base as indicated by Level III in Figure 1 because time would not permit. The administrator, however, must be highly skilled in basic administrative theory to identify the current state of key elements and processes, to select skills, and to implement appropriate actions for accomplishing predictive outcomes at any given moment. The processes then become tools for implementation; and theoretical knowledge and selected skills in the various processes become critical to success.

Difficulty can obviously arise from not having a repertoire of theoretical knowledge or from improper application of theory to a given situation. The learning process must not only bring to the student an awareness of theory as a body of knowledge, but also practice in proper applications. It is the methodology of transferring the body of knowledge to the memory of the student which is critical for the professor while the methodology of transferring theory from memory to practice is critical for the student or practitioner. The two seem to be intimately related and extremely critical because herein lies the age old conflict of theory versus practice. If a practitioner cannot draw upon theoretical knowledge for problem solving, then the exercise holds little meaning.

Summary

The "theory" versus "practice" argument has gone on for years. Part of the problem seems to revolve around the meth-

od by which administrators are educated. The position in this paper has been that two types of theory exist--"pure" and "process." "Pure" theory provides the administrator with information regarding the major organizational components, and "process" theory provides background in the manner by which the major components are integrated. It is from this frame of reference that the position has been developed that theory is at the heart of the curriculum and is indeed very practical.

A model was presented for illustrating student progress through theory courses as well as a model for integrating the skills developed from"process" theory into the "pure" theory frame of reference. It is through this process that understandings obtained in theory become highly useable in dealing with daily administrative functions, and prospective administrators are required to practice theory.

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